

Earthquake

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Category: 7th Heaven

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2000-06-10 08:00:00

Updated: 2000-06-10 08:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 19:00:03

Rating: K

Chapters: 1

Words: 9,434

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: After an earthquake, Ruthie finds a family hiding spot.

Earthquake

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**

When the first tremble hit, Lucy mistakenly assumed a big truck was driving past the house. It didn't hit her that trucks weren't allowed on their street until the photograph on her night stand began to rock back and forth, eventually falling to the floor. Her eyes widened as she realized it was an earthquake.

>
 Jumping off her bed she ran for her door. She knew she needed to get downstairs. She met Simon at the stairs. He had the same frightened look on his face that she was sure was on hers. She pushed him in front of her to go down the stairs first. Right after he passed the brass plant holder that Annie had just proudly put up on the wall, the planter fell. Lucy was glad she had made him go first as the planter missed him.

>
 Unfortunately it didn't miss her. The corner of the brass planter hit Lucy on the head on it's way to the ground. Her head reeling from the glancing blow, Lucy sank to the step. With a shout, Simon grabbed her hand and pulled her the rest of the way to the safety of the door frame to the living room.

>
 The two siblings held each other until the trembling stopped.

Even after the world seemed still once again, Simon and Lucy were afraid to move lest the world start spinning again. Finally, Simon pulled away.

>
 "You're bleeding."

>
 Lucy put her hand to her forehead. Sure enough a trickle of blood met her fingers where the plant holder had hit her. "It's not that bad. Where are the others?"

>
 Simon shook his head and raised his voice. "MARY? RUTHIE? MATT?"

>
 Mary ran from the kitchen with Ruthie in her arms. Both girls appeared to be okay but Ruthie was obviously frightened. The four hugged each other and moved from the doorframe to sit on the stairway.

>
 "That was a good size quake. Ruthie and I were in the kitchen and ducked under the table."

>
 Ruthie was crying. "I don't want everything to shake like that again. I want Mommy and Daddy."

>
 Mary, Lucy, and Simon all exchanged a look. They could sympathize with their youngest sister. They could all remember their first quake and the fear that it had brought. Mary bit her lip. "Mom and the twins are at the doctor's office for the twins' check-up. There's no way to get in touch with her. But Dad's at the church. Simon, why don't you go call him and see how things are there."

>
 Simon nodded and raced to the phone. His face paled as soon as he picked it up. "The line's dead. What do we do now?"

>
 Mary looked at her sisters. Ruthie had buried her face in Mary's shoulder, crying. Lucy had gotten pale except for the blood on her forehead. Mary sighed, she hated having to be the responsible one.

>
 "We don't panic for one thing. I'm sure Dad, Mom and the twins are all fine. They'll be here as soon as it's safe. They are probably just as worried about us."

>
 "Where's Matt?" Lucy asked softly.

>
 Simon glanced up the stairs. "Last time I saw him, he was upstairs in his room. Why didn't he come down like we did?"

>
 Lucy paled even more. "Maybe something fell on him and he's trapped."

>
 She and Simon both started to run back upstairs to check on him but Mary grabbed Lucy's arm. "I'm sure he's fine. I don't think the quake was big enough to cause much damage. Simon, you go up and check on him while I play nurse to Lucy's forehead."

>
 As Simon continued up the stairs alone, Mary and Ruthie led Lucy to the kitchen where the first aid kit was kept. Simon was almost afraid of what he would find as he entered Matt's room. Of all the things he was expecting, the sight before him took him by surprised. Matt was sitting on his bed with his earphones on, jamming on an imaginary guitar.

>
 Shaking his head Simon went to the stereo and turned it off. Suprised by the sudden silence, Matt opened his eyes and glared at Simon.

>
 "What do you want?"

>
 "Are you crazy? We just had a major earthquake and you are up here jamming away like nothing has happened."

>
 Matt just looked at him and pulled off the earphones. "We just had an earthquake? Is everyone okay?"

>
 Simon nodded. "Pretty much. Ruthie is scared to death and Lucy got hit with a brass planter but Mary's taking care of both of them. The phone's dead so we can't get in touch with Mom or Dad."

>
 "That will freak them out when they call to check on us. Come on, let's go downstairs."

>
 When Simon and Matt got to the kitchen, Mary was just finishing putting a butterfly bandage on the cut on Lucy's forehead. After the bleeding had stopped and the blood wiped away, Mary saw that it was only a minor cut but knew that Lucy would have a headache and a big bruise for a while.

>
 Both girls were relieved to see Matt. Lucy had been really afraid that he'd been hurt and Mary was glad to have someone older who could take control of the situation. After he checked to make sure Lucy was all right, Matt looked around.

>
 "Where's Ruthie?"

>
 Mary and Lucy looked around. Mary groaned. "She was right here just a minute ago."

>
 They heard the front closet door close and went to investigate. Matt eased the door open. Sure enough, Ruthie had curled up in the farthest corner of the closet, her football helmet securely on her head. Matt smiled.

>
 "Ruthie, what are you doing in here?"

>
 "I want to be safe if the world starts going crazy again."

>
 "Ruthie, the earthquake is over. We're okay. Come on out."

>
 The seven year old shook her head. Her eyes were still wide with fear. "I'm staying right here forever. I want Mommy and Daddy."

>
 Matt sighed. "Mom and Dad will get here as soon as they can. We don't know how much damage the quake did to the streets so it might take them awhile but I'm sure they are fine and are trying their best to get here as fast as they can. Ruthie, I promise you, you are safe. Come on out."

>
 "NO!"

>
 Simon crawled in beside Ruthie and wrapped his arms around her. "She's scared, Matt. It's her first quake. Give her time to get over it."

>
 Matt ran his hands through his hair. "What good is sitting in this closet going to do?"

>
 Mary couldn't help but smile. "What good did it do you? I seem to remember you doing some hiding in that closet yourself Matt Camden."

>
 Lucy eased into the closet with Simon and Ruthie. She looked around. "I think we've all done our share of hiding in here at some point or another."

>
 Matt frowned. "When did I ever...?"

>
 "For a whole day when you were Simon's age. Don't tell me you've forgotten. How could you? You just knew Dad was going to kill you when he got his hands on you."

>
 Ruthie's interest was piqued. "What did you do, Matt?"

>
 The oldest Camden child groaned. He remembered what Mary was talking about very well and he didn't want to talk about it. But he saw that Ruthie didn't look quite as scared as she did before. He sighed. What was a little embarrassment if in the long run it helped his sister feel better.

>
 "Okay, okay. When I was Simon's age I...."

>
 ***** **Matt's Story *****
> <p>

> A thirteen year old Matt rested his head on the steering wheel of his dad's car. He tried to convince himself that he was dreaming. There was no way he could have actually just wrecked his dad's car. But he knew he had.

> Climbing out of the car, he walked to the back that was now crumpled against the tree. He groaned. There was no way he could hide the huge dent that had been made. He was dead. There was no way around it, Dad was going to kill him.

> Hearing the front door open, Matt panicked. He had to hide. Maybe his dad would think the car slipped out of gear on its own and rolled back into the tree. Quickly, before his dad could see him standing next to the incriminating evidence, Matt bolted into the bushes and used the camouflage of the fence line to hide himself as he made his way to the backdoor.

> In the safety of the house, Matt leaned against the door. Somehow he had managed not to get caught so far. Now, he needed an alibi but who? Ruthie was just a baby, she couldn't vouch for him if anything was said. And seven year old Simon had recently entered that nothing-but-the-truth phase that would prevent his younger brother from lying for him. Mary loved to torment him with all the vengeance that a ten-year-old could muster; she would rather turn him in than help him. That left Lucy. The nine year old would help him out.

> With another look out the window to reassure himself that Eric was still surveying the damage, Matt raced up the stairs. He found Lucy on the floor of her bedroom playing with her Barbies.

> "Hey, Luce, what's going on?"

> His younger sister looked up at him strangely. Since when did he care what she did? She shrugged. "Barbie is getting ready for a date with Ken. He's taking her to a fancy dance."

> Matt came in and sat on the floor with her. "Want me to play with you?"

> Lucy just stared at him for a minute. Matt wanted to play with her? That had to be a first. Something was up. With all the cynicism that a nine-year-old could muster, she frowned. "What do I have to do?"

> Matt looked back at the door to make sure no one was listening in. "All you have to do is tell Mom and Dad that I've been playing with you for the last twenty minutes if they ask. If you do that I will spend the rest of the afternoon playing whatever you want to play."

> Lucy bit her lip. If Matt was willing to spend a whole afternoon playing Barbies with her just so she'd lie for him, he must have done something really horrible. "What did you do?"

> "Does it matter?"

> Lucy nodded. "If Mom and Dad find out I've lied for you, I'll be in as much trouble as you are. I think I have the right to know what I might get in trouble for. So, what did you do?"

> Matt sighed. "I was outside throwing the ball around and I saw Dad get in the car. He cranked it up but before he could pull out, Mom called him back in. He left the car running. I thought it would be cool to pretend I was driving so I got in the car. I wasn't going to mess with anything but my ball dropped. When I leaned down to get it, I must have hit the gearshift. The car started to roll backward and it hit the tree in Mr. Goings yard. There's a huge dent."

> Lucy's eyes were wide. "Wow, no wonder you want me to lie for you."

> "So, will you do it? You are my only hope, Luce. Please?"

> Lucy nodded. She knew she would be in a ton of trouble if their parents found out but it was worth it to have her brother's undivided attention for the whole afternoon. Matt flashed her a smile and picked up Ken. "So, Barbie, are you ready to go yet?"

> Lucy smiled and picked up her Barbie. The doll was wearing jeans and a western shirt. "Of course not. I have to change into my dress

first and you have to put your suit on."

> ***

> Ten year old Mary stood outside the bedroom and smiled. Matt wrecked Dad's car. This was too good to keep to herself. Still smiling, Mary skipped downstairs.

> Eric and Annie were sitting at the kitchen table. Eric was shaking his head. "I know I left the car in park. I don't know how it ended up in reverse."

> "Matt was playing in the car earlier." Mary came up to Eric and smiled innocently. "I saw him in it. Maybe he knows what happened." Taking a cookie off the plate on the table, Mary skipped out of the room once again.

> Eric and Annie exchanged a look. Eric frowned. "Matt?"

> "He was outside the last time I looked. And you know how much he likes cars. Maybe he does know something."

> Eric sighed. "I'll go outside and see if I can find him."

> ***

> "Matt's in trouble." Mary skipped into the bedroom she shared with Lucy. She licked the chocolate off her fingers from the cookie she had just finished.

> Matt looked up, his eyes wide. "What do you mean?"

> "I told Daddy that you were the one who wrecked the car. And boy is he mad."

> Matt paled. "He's going to kill me. I've got to get out of here."

> He started running to the door. He ignored Lucy as she called out to him. "Hey, I thought you said you would play with me all afternoon."

> Matt ran downstairs. He would run down the street to Doug's house. He could stay there until things cooled off here. He opened the door but shut it when he saw Eric walking up the walk.

> He was about to run back upstairs when he heard his mother coming in from the kitchen. With nowhere else to run, Matt ducked into the front closet to hide.

> He barely got the door closed when Eric entered. His heart was beating frantically. He could hear his parents talking on the other side of the closet door.

> "Have you seen Matt?" Eric asked.

> "No, I just checked upstairs. Lucy was upset about something but she wouldn't tell me what."

> "I thought I saw Matt at the door just a second ago. Maybe I was mistaken. Check the house again. I'll run down the street and check at Doug's house. Maybe Matt went there."

> Matt heard their voices getting fainter and let out the breath he didn't know he'd been holding. So much for going to Doug's. Maybe he could just stay right where he was with no one finding him.

> "God, are you listening to me?" Matt prayed quietly. "I really need your help. I didn't mean to wreck Dad's car. Please let him know it was just an accident and that I'm really sorry. I promise I will be good if you'll do this for me."

> ***

> Eric hung up the phone. "That's the last person I can think of to call. No one has seen him."

> Annie hugged him. "I'm scared, Eric. It's starting to get dark. What if something's happened to him. Should we call the police?"

> Eric's eyes were red. "Not yet. I still think he's somewhere safe, we're just not thinking of the right place. Let's go check with the kids again."

> The two adults called Mary, Lucy and Simon into the living room.

Two year old Ruthie was there as well but she was playing with her toys on the floor.

> Eric studied each child. "Your mother and I are very worried about your brother. Do you have any idea where he might be?"

> "Have you tried the front closet? It seems like everyone's favorite hiding place." Seven year old Simon suggested.

> Eric and Annie exchanged a look. Annie smiled. "Why didn't we think of that?"

> Eric shook his head. Without another word, he crossed the room and opened the door to the closet. Sure enough, Matt was inside, curled up asleep.

> The sudden light woke Matt. Seeing Eric staring down at him, Matt groaned. "Uh oh."

> ***

> Ruthie stared at Matt, amazed. She still hadn't emerged from the closet but she didn't look as frightened as she had before. "You wrecked Dad's car. Boy, I bet you were in so much trouble."

> Matt smiled. "Yeah, I was. But it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. I was grounded for two weeks. Dad told me that if I ever did anything like that again, it would be for life. He also made me do work around the house for about a month after that as payment for the damage I caused."

> "That's all? You were lucky."

> Matt laughed. "Yeah I was. Lucky that I hadn't gotten hurt when the car wrecked. Lucky that I hadn't hit anything but the tree. Lucky that Simon thought of this closet. I wouldn't have really wanted to spend the night in here."

> Ruthie looked at Mary. "What about you? Did you ever hide in here?"

> "Well..." Mary hedged.

> "Yes." Matt answered for her. Turn about was fair play after all. "Go on, Mary, tell Ruthie about the time when you were eight and you hid in here because you thought Mom and Dad were...."

> ***** Mary's Story *****

>
 Eight year old Mary Camden closed the back door behind her as she trudged into the kitchen. As she slowly walked over to the kitchen table, Annie looked up from her cookbook. She knew something was wrong when Mary slumped into a chair.

>
 "Mary, what's wrong?" Annie asked as she joined her eldest daughter at the table.

>
 "Jessi's parents don't love her anymore."

>
 Annie put her arms around Mary. "Oh, honey, parents never stop loving their children. Why do you say that?"

>
 "Because they are getting a divorce and making Jessi move to San Francisco."

>
 "Mary, people don't get divorced because they stop loving their children. I know Jessi may feel that way right now but they still love her. Why is she having to go to San Francisco?"

>
 Mary sniffed. "Because that's where her mom is moving to. I think Jessi's grandparents live there. I don't want Jessi to move; she's my best friend."

>
 Annie held her close. "I'm afraid there's nothing you can do about it. Her parents have to make those decisions. Even if you and Jessi don't like those choices, she has to abide by them."

>
 "So there is nothing I can do."

>
 "Of course there is something you can do, an important something. Be Jessi's friend. She's going to need one right now. I think she's pretty lucky to have you as a friend. Now, why don't you run upstairs. You can tell your brothers and sister to start getting ready. Your father is taking us out to dinner tonight."

>
 "Okay, Mom." Mary paused at the door. "Mom, I thought marriage was for always. Why do people get divorced?"

>
 Annie frowned. How do you explain these things to an eight year old. She wished Eric were here to help her field the question. "Marriage should be for always, but for some people things happen. They feel like they have no other option."

>
 The phone rang and interrupted their conversation. As Mary headed upstairs she heard her mom answer the phone.

>
 "Hello... This is Annie Camden... Oh, I see... Are you sure?.... Okay, thank you... Yes, I'll be in touch... Goodbye."

>

>
 Seven year old Lucy groaned as Mary tossed and turned once more. She sat up. "What's wrong Mary?"

>
 "I just can't help feeling bad for Jessi. This shouldn't be happening."

>
 "You're right. I have several friends in my class whose parents are divorced. It makes me wonder sometimes if even Mom and Dad can make it."

>
 Mary looked at her. "Of course they'll make it. Why would you say something like that?"

>
 Lucy sighed. "Because, they are people just like everyone else. I'm not saying they are going to split up; I'm just saying it could happen to anyone. Just because Dad is a preacher doesn't mean he's not like everyone else."

>
 "Mom and Dad would never get a divorce. They never fight."

>
 "Mom was snapping at Dad all night. Go to bed, Mary. You're right, it probably will never happen but if you think that it can't you're fooling yourself."

>
 Lucy turned back over and started to drift off to sleep. Mary watched her for a second and slipped downstairs. She stopped outside the living room when she heard her parents talking. It sounded like they were arguing.

>
 "Annie, are you sure about this?"

>
 "Positive, Eric. It's a done deal. I know we didn't plan for this but I think it's going to be the best thing for the whole family."

>
 "I'm in shock. I never expected this. What are we going to tell the kids? They aren't going to be happy about this."

>
 "We'll have to tell them in a way that will make them like it. We'd better tell them soon because whether they like it or not, the number of people living in this house is going to change."

>
 The news hit Mary like a ton of bricks. Lucy was right. It could happen to their parents and it sounded like it already had. Tears filled her eyes. How could they do that to them?

>
 She could hear them coming. She didn't want them to know she heard them but didn't want to go back upstairs. Instead she darted into the front closet. The door had barely closed when her parents left the living room.

>
 "We'll tell the kids in the morning. The sooner they know, the sooner they can be prepared for what's coming."

>
 Inside the closet, Mary shook with her tears. She would stay in there until they were frantic with worry. Let them feel what it would be like for the whole family not to be together. Maybe then, they'd think twice about what they were doing.

>
 "Dear God," she prayed. "Please don't let my parents get a divorce. Make them realize they still love each other."

>

>
 "Eric, I can't find Mary anywhere. It doesn't even look like her bed was slept in."

>
 "I'm sure she's fine. Does Lucy know where she is?"

>
 Annie shook her head. "No, she said Mary was upset last night. Mary left the room but Lucy fell asleep before she came back. Eric what if she didn't come back? She was so upset yesterday about Jessi having to move..."

>
 "Annie, don't panic. We'll find her. Call Jessi and her other friends. Maybe she's with one of them. I'll check with the kids to see if they have any idea where she might have gone."

>

>
 Two hours later, they still had not found Mary. Annie was ready to call the police to have them start searching and Eric was about to agree.

>
 "I'll call Sgt. Michaels and see what he can do."

>
 Before Eric could pick up the receiver, he heard crying coming from the front closet. Exchanging a look with Annie, he opened the door. Sure enough, Mary was cuddled up on the floor crying.

>
 Eric eased her out and into his lap. He and Annie both hugged the distraught girl. "Mary, you had us so worried. What were you doing in there?"

>
 "I don't want you to divorce. I want us all to stay together. Please think about what you are doing to us."

>
 Eric looked at Annie confused. Annie caressed the small girl's cheek. "Honey, what makes you think your father and I are getting a divorce?"

>
 Mary sniffled. "I heard you last night. You said the number of people in this house was going to change."

>
 Understanding dawned on the parents. Annie smiled. "Mary, your father and I love each other very much. We aren't getting a divorce."

>
 "Then what...?"

>
 Eric hugged her tightly. "Why don't we get everyone together in the living room and we'll tell everyone at the same time."

>

>
 In the present, Ruthie looked at each of her siblings. "So, don't keep me waiting. What was going on?"

>
 Mary laughed and snuggled beside Ruthie in the closet. "They told us they were going to have a baby. You."

>
 Ruthie grinned. "Really, you thought they were getting a divorce and instead you got me?"

>
 Matt grinned. "I think it worked out for the better that way."

>
 "So, Matt wrecked Dad's car and Mary was afraid I was the break up of the family. What about you, Lucy?"

>
 Lucy looked a little funny. Her head was pounding from the blow she had taken. She blushed. "I don't want to talk about it. It was a long time ago and it all worked out. It's embarrassing?"

>
 Simon laughed. "And what happened to Matt and Mary wasn't?"

>
 Matt touched Lucy's arm. "Yeah, Luce, go and tell her about it. It was a typical Lucy moment."

>
 Lucy sighed. It was obvious they weren't going to back down. "Okay, right after you were born and I was about to turn eight, I got it in my head that...."

>
 ***** **Lucy's Story *****

>
 Annie brought two month old Ruthie up to her shoulder and patted her back. She smiled when seven year old Lucy laid down on the couch beside her and rested her head in her mom's lap.

>
 "What's wrong, Luce?"

>
 "I just realized that now that Ruthie is here, I'm the middle child. Everything bad happens to the middle child. Couldn't you have had twins or something so there'd be an even number of us kids?"

>
 Annie laughed and groaned good-naturedly. "One baby at a time is more than enough, thank you very much. And I wouldn't worry about being the middle child. Sometimes it can be a very special place to be."

>
 "Says who?"

>
 "One of my best friends in high school. She had an older brother and a younger sister, just like Mary before we had Simon and Ruthie. She always said she wouldn't have wanted it any other way."

>
 "I still think I would have rathered you have twins. How about you and Daddy having another baby right away?"

>
 Annie's eyes grew wide at the suggestion. "How about we enjoy having Ruthie around for awhile. Would you like to hold her?"

>

>
 "Eric, I think it's time we tell Lucy about Luke." Annie set the book she'd been reading on the nightstand.

>
 Eric glanced over at her. "Why? I thought we agreed we'd tell her when she became a teenager and was old enough to understand."

>
 "Lucy is very mature for her age. Besides now that Ruthie is here, Lucy's feeling the weight of being the middle child. I think it might make her feel special."

>
 "Or make her feel worse. I don't know, Annie. We both know how sensitive Lucy is. I just don't know if now is the right time."

>
 "At least think about it. Okay?"

>
 Eric leaned over and kissed Annie. "I'll think about it. Now get some sleep. Ruthie is going to be demanding food in a little bit."

>

>
 Lucy closed the Bible and frowned. Six year old Simon looked at her as he set up the Connect Four game. "I don't think the Bible is supposed to make you frown, Lucy."

>
 "Matthew was a disciple, there are so many Mary's I couldn't keep count. Peter's name was Simon before Jesus came along and changed his name. And Ruth turned her back on her home and beliefs to worship her mother-in-law's God."

>
 Simon rolled his eyes. "Thanks for the Sunday School lesson. Now, are you going to play this game with me or what?"

>
 "I'll play but you know I'm going to beat you. I'm going to be red. Didn't anything sound familiar about those names I just mentioned?"

>
 "Yeah, they all in the Bible and Dad's told us about them a bunch of times."

>
 "And they happen to be the names of all Mom and Dad's kids, except for me." Lucy rolled her eyes and dropped her red checker in the center slot.

>
 "Yeah, so?" Simon studied the board and then dropped a black checker in the last slot.

>
 "So, I've looked and looked and I can't find one Lucy in the whole Bible." She dropped her next checker in the slot to the right of the first.

>
 Simon rolled his eyes. He'd never understand girls if he tried for a year. He dropped his next checker on top of the first. Lucy smiled and dropped a red checker in a slot next to the other two. Now no matter where Simon put his checker, she could win on her next turn.

>
 "So, your name isn't in the Bible. What's that got to do with anything?" He dropped a black checker next to hers. He didn't seem to be aware that she could win from the other side.

>
 "So, why would Mom and Dad name all of you after Bible people and not me? It doesn't make sense." She dropped her checker in for

the win. "Game over, I win again."

>
 Simon stared at the line of red checkers and frowned. How did she always do that? "Maybe they didn't name you after a Bible person because they didn't name you at all. Maybe someone left you on the doorstep at the church and they felt sorry for you and brought you home." He pushed the lever to one side and the checkers spilled out the bottom. "Rematch."

>
 Lucy frowned. "No. I need to find Matt."

>
 "Aw, come on Luce, this time I know I can beat you." But Lucy was already gone.

>
 She found her older brother in his room. She pulled herself up onto eleven year old Matt's bed. He looked up from the comic book he was reading.

>
 "What do you want?"

>
 "Matt, how old were you when I was born?"

>
 "Three, why?"

>
 "Do you remember when I was born?"

>
 Matt shook his head. All he wanted to do was read his comic book. "I don't remember much about being three years old. Why all the questions, Lucy?"

>
 "Just asking. Don't get all upset over it. You sure you don't remember?"

>
 Matt tossed his magazine aside. "Of course I don't remember because you weren't born. Mom and Dad picked you up off the side of the road and brought you home. Now will you please leave me alone. You had a note on your clothes that said, 'Hi, my name is Lucy. I will grow up to ask a lot of stupid questions but please love me anyway.' Happy?"

>
 Big tears welled up in Lucy's eyes. "You are so mean, Matt Camden. I'm sorry I talked to you at all."

>
 She ran out in the hallway. Annie was just coming from her room after feeding Ruthie. She hugged Lucy when she saw the tears. "What's wrong honey?"

>
 "Why did I have to be some little girl you and Daddy felt sorry for?"

>
 Annie looked confused? "What are you talking about?"

>
 "Matt just told me all about when I was born."

>
 "I'm sure whatever it was it wasn't the truth. But Lucy, your daddy and I do want to tell you something aboutâ€|"

>
 Lucy cried even harder. "I know what you are going to say and I don't want to hear it. I want to be your little girl. Not someone else's."

>
 Lucy pulled away from her mother's arms and flew down the stairs. She was about to run outside but noticed it was raining. Instead she ducked into the front closet, remembering when Mary had used it earlier that year.

>
 Crouching down on the floor and pulling her legs up to her, Lucy began to pray. "Dear Lord, I just want to know who my real Mommy and Daddy are. Please let my now Mommy and Daddy be them."

>
 A couple of minutes later the door opened and Eric and Annie looked in at her. Annie smiled. "Lucy, we need to talk. Come out here."

>
 Lucy shook her head. She didn't want to hear the truth. She only wanted things to be the way they were before. Eric reached in and pulled her out and into his arms. She clung to him tightly.
>
 "Oh, Lucy, what makes you think that we aren't your real parents?"

>
 Lucy sniffled. "Matt said you picked me up off the side of the road."

>
 Annie rolled her eyes. What was she going to do with her

oldest child? "Matt was just joking, sweetie. He wasn't even old enough to remember when you were born."

>
 "Then why don't I have a Bible name like the others do?"

>
 Eric and Annie exchanged a look. Finally Eric took a deep breath. "Because we wanted you to have a name close to your brother's."

>
 Lucy gave him a funny look. "How close is Lucy to either Matt or Simon?"

>
 Annie laughed. "It's not but it is very close to Luke."

>
 Lucy wiped her eyes. "I don't have a brother named Luke."

>
 Annie caressed her cheek. "You don't now but for about a day after you were born, you did. You had a twin brother, Lucy. But he was very sick when he was born and he died the next day. Your father and I were very sad but we were also relieved that you were okay. We are very much your parents Lucy and we are real glad to be."

>

>
 Fifteen year old Lucy accepted the tissue Matt handed her. He and Mary had been told about Luke not long after Lucy but this was the first time Ruthie and Simon had heard the story. Simon shook his head. "Wow, I had another brother that I never knew about. But you know what that means, don't you Lucy?"

>
 "What, Simon?"

>
 "You weren't a middle child. I'm not a middle child either. Not if we count Luke."

>
 Lucy grinned. Her head was still pounding but at least her turn was over. Let them torture Simon for a while.

>
 Almost on cue, Ruthie turned to Simon. "Okay, Mister, spill the beans."

>
 Simon tried to laugh it off. "You don't really want to..."

>
 Ruthie folded her arms over her chest. "I'm waiting."

>
 Simon shook his head. She would regret this when she heard his story. "Okay, okay, when I was eight years old I was supposed to be watching you at the park. Only I was actually playing with my friend. And while I wasn't looking...."

*** **Simon's Story** ***

> <p>

"No, way, Cosmic Jay is so much cooler than Dynamite Doug." Eight year old Simon shook his head as he playfully argued with his friend Brad.

>
 "Come on, Camden, can Cosmic Jay blow things up with a fire bolt from his hand?"

>
 "No, but he can shoot lasers from his eyes. What can be cooler than that?" Simon laughed. But his laughter turned to a groan when he saw his mother's car pull into the parking lot. "There's my mom, I've got to go."

>
 "Okay, Simon, I'll see you tomorrow." Brad looked around. "Hey, where's your sister?"

>
 Simon went pale as he looked at the sandbox. He had left three year old Ruthie there not that long ago. He was supposed to be watching her but he thought she would be fine since he would be no further than the jungle gym five feet away. But now the sandbox was empty. He looked around. Maybe she had decided to wander over to the swings or to the slide.

>
 He couldn't find her anywhere. He saw Annie walking across the park grounds and ran to her. He didn't think about the fact that he would be in big trouble for losing his sister; he just wanted her found, safe and sound.

>
 "Mom, I can't find Ruthie anywhere."

>
 Annie stopped and stared at him in horror. "What do you mean, you can't find her? You were supposed to be watching her."

>
 "I was Mom, I was just a few feet away talking to Brad when I noticed she wasn't at the sand box. I didn't mean to lose her, Mom, I promise."

>
 Annie hugged her youngest son. She was deeply worried but knew it would do no good to let Simon see that. "I know you didn't. She must be here somewhere. Let's look around."

>
 After ten minutes of searching without success, Annie could hide her worry no longer. She turned to Simon, her eyes wide with fear and her voice more than a little shaky. "Simon, I'm going to see if I can find a police officer to help. I want you to run home and get your father. Tell him to get here as quick as he can."

>
 Simon did as his mother commanded running all the way. By the time he reached the house he was out of breath and crying. Eric was concerned when he saw the eight year old.

>
 "Simon, what is it?"

>
 "I lost Ruthie at the park. I'm sorry, Dad, I didn't mean to. Mom wants you there now."

>
 Eric took just a minute to hug his son. "Okay, Simon. We'll find her. You stay here in case she comes here somehow." And then he was gone.

>
 Simon sank to the floor and began to cry in earnest. True, sometimes he resented all the attention the three year old got but he never wanted anything bad to happen to her. Now there was no telling what had happened to her and it was all his fault.

>
 How would he ever be able to face his mom and dad? After several minutes he came to the conclusion he didn't deserve such a loving family. They would be better off without him. But still, he couldn't bring himself to leave. He wanted to know for sure if Ruthie was all right.

>
 He wandered into the foyer and suddenly remembered the hall closet. It had been a good enough hiding place for Matt last year when he wrecked Dad's car, and the year before that when Lucy had thought she was adopted, and not to mention the year before that when Mary had thought Mom and Dad were divorcing. Maybe just maybe it would be good enough for him.

>
 Opening the door, he sank inside and pulled the door shut. Then he allowed himself to fear what Ruthie might be going through. As tears once more poured down his face, he began to pray.

>
 "Dear Lord, it's me, Simon Camden. I realize I'm probably the last person you want to hear from right now but this isn't about me; it's about my little sister Ruthie. She's missing and I'm scared something bad may have happened to her. So will you please watch out for her and keep her safe? If you could bring her home safely, I promise I will be the best big brother I can be. That is if Mom and Dad still want me to be apart of the family when this is over."

>

>
 Eric put his arm around Annie as they waited for news from the officer. She leaned her head on his shoulder as tears coursed her cheeks. "She's got to be okay, Eric. I don't know what I would do if..."

>
 Eric stood up, surprised. "Is that Matt? It looks like he's holding..."

>
 "Ruthie!!" Both Eric and Annie shouted at the same time. They both rushed to where their oldest child was walking toward them, their youngest child in his arms. Annie took the three year old from him and hugged her tight.

>
 Matt looked at them confused. "What was Ruhie doing at the church playground by herself?"

>
 Eric's eyes widened. "She walked all the way over there? It's a wonder she didn't get hit by a car."

>
 "Firetruck." Ruthie explained with a grin.

>
 Annie shook her head. "She loves that firetruck gym in the playground. I can't believe she walked all the way over there by herself. We better get her home. I bet Simon is worried sick."

>

>
 By the time the four reached the Camden house, Ruthie had fallen asleep on Annie's shoulder. Inside, she handed the sleeping child over to Matt and asked him to put her in her bed.

>
 Eric and Annie searched the whole house. Not really expecting to find him there, Eric opened the closet door. Sure enough Simon was inside. Both Eric and Annie knelt beside him.

>
 "We found Ruthie, or rather Matt did. She walked over to the church. But she's fine."

>
 Simon looked from Eric to Annie with his tearstained face. "I'm sorry I lost her. I can't believe I took my eyes off her for a moment. I guess you are pretty mad."

>
 Eric opened his mouth to answer but Annie beat him to it. "Yes, we are. But I think you were scared enough today not to ever do anything like that again. Am I right?"

>
 Simon nodded. "I was so scared something had happened to her and that you guys would hate me."

>
 Annie pulled him close for a hug. "Oh, Simon, Your father and I could never hate you. Even if something had happened we would still love you. Nothing could ever change that."

>
 Simon relaxed then and let his parents comfort him.

>

>
 "How dare you lose me like that?" Ruthie asked indignantly.

>
 Simon rolled his eyes. "I've made up for that day a million times over. I'm sorry it happened but it never happened again."

>
 Just then the front door opened and Eric stepped in. When he saw his five oldest kids sitting half in and half out of the closet, he said a silent prayer of thanksgiving. He hugged each of the kids who were also relieved to see him.

>
 He frowned when he saw the bandage on Lucy's head. "Are you all right?"

>
 Lucy nodded. "The planter fell and hit me on the head. No cracks about how hard my head is." She smiled.

>
 Eric continued to look worried as he examined the wound. Lucy allowed him to fuss over it for just a moment before pulling away. "Relax, Dad, it's all right. I have a headache that won't quit but other than that, I'm fine."

>
 Not completely satisfied, Eric nodded. "Where's your mom and the twins?"

>
 Now it was Matt's turn to frown. "She hasn't got back from the doctor's office yet. Our phone lines are down so we couldn't call and check on her."

>
 "I know, I tried to call. I'm sure she's fine; the damage wasn't too severe. She'll be home as soon as she can." All of the kids could tell he wasn't completely convinced of that but said nothing. He looked at each of them once again.

>
 "What are you all doing in the front closet?"

>
 Mary explained about Ruthie being scared after the earthquake and how they had been telling her about times they too had been scared. Eric smiled as he remembered the instances they were referring to.

>
 He sat down with them. Ruthie gave him a curious glance. "So, Daddy, have you ever hidden in here?"

>
 Simon laughed. "Come on, Ruthie, Dad wouldn't hide from anything."

>
 Eric thought back to three years ago and that nightmarish day when his worst fears seemed to be coming true. "Well, I never hid in there exactly but it was useful to hide my fears from you guys and your mother."

>
 Everyone was surprised to hear this and so they all settled back to listen. Eric cleared his throat as it suddenly became dry. "Three years ago, I thought..."

>
 ***** **Eric's Story** *****

>
 "Eric, I need you to come home right now."

>
 All the way from the church office to the car and on the drive home, those words haunted Eric. It wasn't so much the words as the panic Annie had had in her voice. He could tell she was trying to hide it but he could still hear it plainly even over the phone.

>
 He couldn't imagine what it could be. He didn't think it could be something with the kids. Annie was always so good at handling their emergencies. If anything, he was always the one who became emotional in a crisis.

>
 Pulling in the driveway, he barely remembered to put the car in park before rushing inside. The house was strangely quiet. That in itself was odd. With a sixteen year old, a thirteen year old, a twelve year old, a ten year old and a five year old, there was always some commotion going on in the house. Especially now that it was Christmas vacation.

>
 He found Annie in the living room, her face pale. It was obvious she had been crying. He knelt beside her and folded her into his embrace. "Annie, what's wrong? Where are the kids?"

>
 Annie tried to pull herself together. "Matt is at Mark's house getting ready to go camping. Mary is at basketball practice. Lucy and Simon took Ruthie to the park."

>
 Eric nodded. That answered his question about the kids' whereabouts but not the one about what was wrong. He gently wiped the tears from her eyes. "Annie?"

>
 "I had my annual physical today. The doctor found something that has him worried and frankly I'm scared." Fresh tears formed in her eyes.

>
 "What is it, Sweetheart? Please tell me." Eric's mind was automatically flipping through horrible alternatives.

>
 "He found a lump in my breast. He wants me to have it biopsied. He's afraid it might be malignant." She broke down and sobbed.

>
 Eric sat there and held her. He felt like he had been punched in the gut by the news but he refused to cry. Annie needed him to be strong right then. He owed it to her to comfort her, not have her comfort him.

>
 "When does he want to do it?" Eric asked when she finally pulled away.

>
 "Friday. He said the sooner the better. Eric, I'm not scared to die. I know I have a place in Heaven waiting on me. But I'm scared of leaving behind my kids and you. There's so much I've never said or got to do with all of you."

>
 Eric pulled her close again. "Oh, Annie, you are not going to die. I refuse to believe anything else. Where would I be without you? Everything is going to be just fine; you'll see."

>
 Annie bit her lower lip, wanting to believe him more than anything. Finally she nodded. "Eric, will you do me a favor?"

>
 "Anything." Eric promised without hesitation.

>
 "Go pick up the kids and bring them home. Even Matt. I know he'll be furious about missing the camping trip but I really need to

spend tonight with my family real close by."

>
 Eric kissed her forehead. "If that's what you want. Should we tell the kids?"

>
 Annie shook her head. "There's no sense worrying them until we know for sure. If you'll go and pick them up, I'll think of a convincing reason before you get back."

>
 Eric hugged her tightly. "We'll think of something to tell them. Will you be okay until I get back?"

>
 Annie nodded. "Yeah, I'll be fine."

>
 Eric didn't want to leave her but couldn't refuse her request. He stopped in the front hall to get another coat. He had been in such a hurry when he left the church that he left his coat at the office.

>
 Opening the closet door, the full force of the situation hit him. Hidden by the closet door, Eric broke down and started to cry. His body shook with his sobs.

>
 "Dear God, please don't take her away from me. She's the most important person in my life and I don't know what I'd do if I lost her."

>
 He wasn't sure how long he stood there crying in the doorway of the closet. But finally, concerned because she hadn't heard the door, Annie came in to the hallway and saw her him there.

>
 Husband and wife held each other as they both cried in each other's arms.

>

>
 Lucy had tears running down her face as Eric told his story. "I remember Mom going into the hospital for some tests. But she never told us what it was for."

>
 Matt hung his head. "I wish I had known. I was so mad that I missed that camping trip. I take it things were okay."

>
 Eric nodded. "Yeah, it turned out to be a benign cyst. But those were the scariest days of my life."

>
 Ruthie climbed into Eric's lap but was still mostly inside the closet. "I wish Mommy was here right now."

>
 Eric hugged her close. "So do I."

>
 The front door opened and Annie entered pushing the double stroller with the twins inside. She smiled when she saw them. Lucy and Simon jumped up and ran to her hugging her tightly.

>
 Glad to see that her family was alright, Annie took just a moment to fuss over Lucy's injury before explaining what happened. "The doctor's office wasn't damaged at all. Unfortunately the parking lot couldn't say the same. The station wagon is pretty messed up. Lucky for me, Sgt. Michaels happened to be patrolling the area and gave me and the boys a ride home. What are all of you doing in the closet?"

>
 Mary smiled and rubbed Ruthie's back. "Someone didn't like the rumbling."

>
 Annie smiled and kissed her youngest daughter's nose. "I didn't either."

>
 Ruthie seemed a lot more at ease now that the whole family was home and safe but she wasn't ready to leave the closet. Annie smiled at her. "That closet does seem pretty safe when Nature is at it's worst, doesn't it?"

>
 Ruthie's eyes grew wide. "Have you hid in here as well, Mommy."

>
 Annie nodded as she settled down on the floor with her family. Lucy had picked Sam up and was cuddling him while Mary had taken David. "I sure did. Matt wasn't too much older than Sam and David at the time. It took your father a while to convince me to come out."

>
 Eric smiled. "I remember that. Even though the danger had long passed, there you were still hiding away."
>
 Ruthie leaned against Eric. "Tell me about it, Mommy."
>
 "Okay. Like I said, Matt was the twin's age so the rest of you weren't even born. The weather had been...."
>
 ***** **Annie's Story** *****
>
 The phone rang just as a bolt of lightning struck near-by. Annie answered the phone with the thunder booming. "Hello?"
>
 "Hey, Annie, just checking in to make sure things are okay."

>
 Annie tried to keep the fear out of her voice but the truth was she was scared. She hadn't seen a storm this severe in years. She glanced over at the blanket she had spread out for three month old Matt. "Eric, when can you get home? The station is saying we are under a tornado watch."
>
 "I'll be home as soon as I can but things are going crazy around here with the storm. If things get too rough get Matt and get somewhere in the middle of the house."
>
 Lightning flashed again and Annie heard a popping on the phone. "Eric, I'm afraid lightning may hit the phone line. I'm going to get off. Hurry home."
>
 "I will. I love you."
>
 "Love you too."
>
 Annie hung up the phone and picked a sleeping Matt up, cuddling him to her chest. Suddenly a siren cut through the worst of the storm. Annie's heart hammered in her chest. She knew that siren was a warning to the residents of Glenoak that a tornado was coming.

>
 Without another thought, Annie rushed to the foyer. She looked around briefly, wondering where the best place to get would be. She knew she needed to stay downstairs but there was so much glass in the foyer that she was afraid she or the baby would be cut. Finally her eyes landed on front closet.
>
 She flung open the door and settled herself and Matt on the floor before closing the door. Outside, all she could hear was the wind, thunder and the warning siren. Tears streamed down her face as she held Matt closer.
>
 "Please, Lord, protect us from this storm."
>

>
 Eric opened the front door and looked around frantically. His sole thought from the time the siren went off was getting home to his wife. It had taken him almost an hour before he was able to break away from the church.
>
 "Annie?" He called out. He frowned as he received no answer. "Annie?"
>
 Then he heard Matt crying and followed the sound. He opened the closet door and let out a sigh of relief as he saw her huddled on the floor. He knelt down and hugged her tightly. "Are you okay?"
>
 "I am now that you are here. What about the tornado?"
>
 "It never touched down. The storm is even starting to lessen up. Come on, it looks like Matt's hungry."
>

>
 Ruthie sighed. "Why didn't anyone ever tell me that this was such a good hiding place?"
>
 Matt laughed. "I guess it's something you had to learn on your own. One day I guess Sam and David will learn it too."
>
 Annie put her arm around Lucy who was sitting next to her with a sleeping Sam on her shoulder. She smiled at her youngest daughter. "You ready to come out of there now?"
>
 Ruthie shook her head. "I'm still scared that the world's

going to shake again."

>
 "You know what, this closet was not only a good place to hide but apparently it was a good place to pray as well." Mary offered.

>
 Ruthie brightened. "Can I pray that God won't make everything shake anymore?"

>
 Eric laughed. "Ruthie, you can pray for that but I don't think it's something that God is going to guarantee for you. I would recommend that you pray that God helps you not to be scared. What do you say?"

>
 Ruthie considered it for a minute. "I guess it's worth a try." She bowed her head. "Dear God, please don't let the Earth shake again but if that's too big a job for you then can you at least not let me be scared so much?"

>
 The others laughed at the innocence of her prayer. Eric hugged her. "So, what do you say, you ready to come out and help us decide what we should fix for supper?"

>
 "Can I keep my helmet on? Just in case?"

>
 Annie smiled and kissed her cheek. "I think that will be just fine."

> <p>

End
file.